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ABSTRACT

The benefits of people and agencies working cooperatively clearly outweigh the costs. When an agency works by itself, it avoids risks, protects its resources, gets sole credit, and controls goals, methods, and efforts. When agencies cooperate, they can prevent duplication of efforts and services, economize and stretch resources, multiply the efforts of personnel and facilities, serve clients more effectively, increase public support for all agencies involved, and achieve goals unreachable individually. One planning technique for developing interagency cooperation is the Process Model by Janove (1984). This cyclical model is an ongoing process with six phases: assessment; setting realistic goals; formulation of an action plan; implementation of the action plan; evaluation; and reassessment and recycling. With scarce human, financial, and agency resources, the need for agency cooperation has never been greater. By combining and coordinating forces, the group has a greater potential than individual efforts. The whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts, and synergy is achieved. (YLB)

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INTERAGENCY COOPERATION SYNERGY FOR THE 1990's

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The concept of agencies and organizations joining together to achieve more than one agency could accomplish alone is always appealing in principle. It really makes sense to work together for the benefit of not only the constituents, but also for the agency personnel.

Since people, not agencies, cooperate, many combinations of the usual problems and conflicts occur when human beings attempt to work together for a common purpose. There is the possibility of problems with personality clashes, conflicting values, divergent goals, ineffective communications, threat to status or persons, unequal efforts, unequal benefits, or any number of other difficulties.

There is no question that it is often easier to work alone. However, the complexities of our society, combined with scarce personnel and diminishing financial resources, compel us to work together on many projects. According to Van Ness (1981), the benefits of people and agencies working cooperatively clearly outweigh the costs. Cooperation requires that each party relinquishes something; that is, a part of his or her autonomy, as he or she gains something, or a willingness to share responsibilities and develop trust in other people. Cooperation is not as "clean and

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neat" or as simple as "going solo"; however, it is more effective. A Mott Foundation Community Education Training Film entitled "2 + 2 = 6" describes synergy and mutual collaboration through interagency cooperation. The combined results of people of good will and integrity can far exceed the efforts of the most dedicated person working diligently but separately. Van Ness (1981) suggests combining efforts and a better understanding of interagency cooperation.

When an agency works by itself, it will:

1) Avoid risk(s) or threat(s).
2) Protect its resources.
3) Get sole credit for its efforts.
4) Control goals, methods , and efforts.

However, when agencies cooperate, they can:

1) Prevent duplication of efforts and overlapping of services.
2) Economize and stretch resources.
3) Multiply the efforts of personnel and facilities.
4) Serve the clientele more effectively.
5) Increase public support for all agencies involved.
6) Achieve goals unreachable individually.

According to Shoop (1984), there are a number of assumptions which underlie the acceptance of the need for cooperation among all the agencies in a given community:

1) Economically, it is often unsound to duplicate existing facilities in a community.

2) Cooperation is preferable to competition.

3) It is more logical to serve one specific need well, than to serve many needs partially.

4) There is more need for services in any given community than there are services available.

5) Needs change with a community.

6) Needs within a given community differ from person to person.

7) There are many services that have logical relatedness and mutual benefits.

8) The people for whom the services are designed should be provided with the opportunities to participate in the decisions affecting the delivery system(s) of services.

There are some effective methods to gain cooperation among competing agencies. Several important methods for cooperation are suggested. Show the greater needs of people, not just your (own agency's) need. Make the cooperative efforts simple and inexpensive. Develop mutually agreeable goals benefitting all the parties or agencies involved. Present a low threat and take a "low profile" in the interagency process. Remember that interagency cooperation is legal, possible and practical. Work with willing groups, and don't "freeze out" unwilling groups. Leave the door open for future cooperation . Ask individuals or groups for their help and / or offer your help and assistance. Show how cooperation will enhance or expand existing efforts. Good communication is really the heart of cooperation.

There are positive and negative forces which both inhibit and facilitate interagency cooperation. Common inhibitors which prevent agency and organization cooperation are:

1) Competition for resources, recognition, or status, inhibits cooperation.

2) Unclear mission or purpose. Agencies may not see the need for cooperation. Often, there is a lack of ownership or input.

3) Organization structure and / or insecure leadership innibits cooperation. There may be perceived co-opting of powers.

4) Unequal power bases, differing value systems, priorities or concerns are seen as unresolved conflicts.

5) Often, The Four Terrible "T's" of Time, Trust, Turf and Tradition innibit cooperation.

6) Past negative experiences with cooperating and / or a perceived threat to persons or to the agency inhibits cooperation.

7) Hidden agenda, misinformation and "red tape" are strong innibitors.

8) Fear of failure, personal resentment, jealousy, and hurt feelings are detractors for cooperation.

9) Legal jargon, legal constraints, racism, sexism, ageism, a win-lose attitude and often just plain resistance to change are strong deterents.

10) Lack of a sense of true community may be the greatest inhibitor.

And then the reverse; there are ten common suggestions which promote interagency cooperation measures. These facilitators include:

1) Develop common goals, seeking mutual benefits and concerns for clients; promoting more efficient and effective use of of facilities, personnel, materials and finances.

2) Get to know persons individually within another agency. Use good communication skills and build bridges of trust.

3) Convince the organizational leadership that it is mutually beneficial to cooperate through demonstrated examples.

4) Develop and demonstrate mutual trust and mutual concerns. Foster supportive relationships and assure others that no one will be co-opted by the merger of time, talents, and agencies.

5) Develop a feeling of ownership by all parties. Demonstrate a willingness for compromises. Develop a positive attitude for working together on common projects.

6) Know and understand the purposes, goals and mission of the other agencies and organizations. Work to develop common goals and objectives to serve the clientele. Look toward the future as you develop long-range goals.

7) Be flexible! Seek common understandings and be willing to accept additional training and staff development for personnel, better agency cooperation, and leadership development.

8) When possible, develop an advisory council or board of directors from all agencies involved to share mutual concerns, discuss common problems, and work toward finding solutions and avenues for future cooperative measures.

9) Work toward joint / collective funding projects which will be mutually beneficial to all agencies involved.

10) Share resource files, assessment techniques, monitoring procedures, and evaluation techniques and above all, develop a true sense of cooperation and build community.

Janove (1984) suggests six important steps as a means of developing a Plan of Action for interagency cooperation:

1) Each agency's staff must make a thorough assessment of its mission, responsibilities and activities. " What aren't we doing that we should?" and "What are we doing that we shouldn't?" All the questions must be related to "What are the most important activities that we (should) conduct to fulfill our mission?" The agency must then prioritize those activities.

2) Identify those activities for which the agency believes it is totally responsible. Laws, community expectations, and practices place demands on agencies and their boards of directors that define areas of uniqueness. Agencies that are aware of their unique responsibilities save themselves and others much wasted and inappropriate efforts. These areas are non-negotiable items.

3) Identify and meet with the staff of other agencies, organizations, and institutions which appear to share some of your goals, responsibilities, interests and activities.

4) Mutually identify some areas of common concern and develop plans to cooperate, implement and evaluate the programs and activities.

5) Gradually increase the number of agencies and specific activities involved.

6) Each agency's staff will continue to assess its own purpose, mission and goals, evaluate and assess cooperative efforts.

Another planning technique for developing interagency cooperation is the Process Model developed by Janove (1984). This six-step model, cyclic in nature is an ongoing process [See Figure # 1].

Phase One of the model involves ASSESSMENT-- the purpose is to determine where you are or what conditions exist. Assessments (both formal and informal) identifiy the group's purpose(s), determine information that is needed, and clarifiy the process of gathering data in relationship to goals and available resources.

Phase Two involves SETTING REALISTIC GOALS to meet determined needs. A goal is defined as a positive statement that tells what broad need is to be met, or which community conditions are going to be changed. Alternative solutions are identified and those you think will work are listed as objectives.

Phase Three, FORMULATION OF AN ACTION PLAN, includes:

A) Strategies to reach the specific objectives (and thus to attain the goals).

B) Identification of people, groups and agencies which should be involved, and strategies to enlist their cooperation.

C) Examination and exploration of existing community resources --- human, financial and physical ---to see how they are now impacting on the problem and where they could be involved.

D) Planning for evaluation procedures which examine the action plan to ensure that it is comprehensive, coordinated, and attacking the whole problem, not just part of it. Evaluation strategies are developed for the next phases.

The fourth phase is the IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN. The strategies are now put into motion, with special care given to be sure that people know what they are to do. Assignments of responsibilities with deadlines for accomplishing tasks are clearly delineated and determined.

Phase Five involves the EVALUATION PROCESS. Activities are identified to determine whether or not strategies are taking place as planned and whether or not they are having the desired effect. If the answers are negative, immediate changes are made to attain the desired ends.

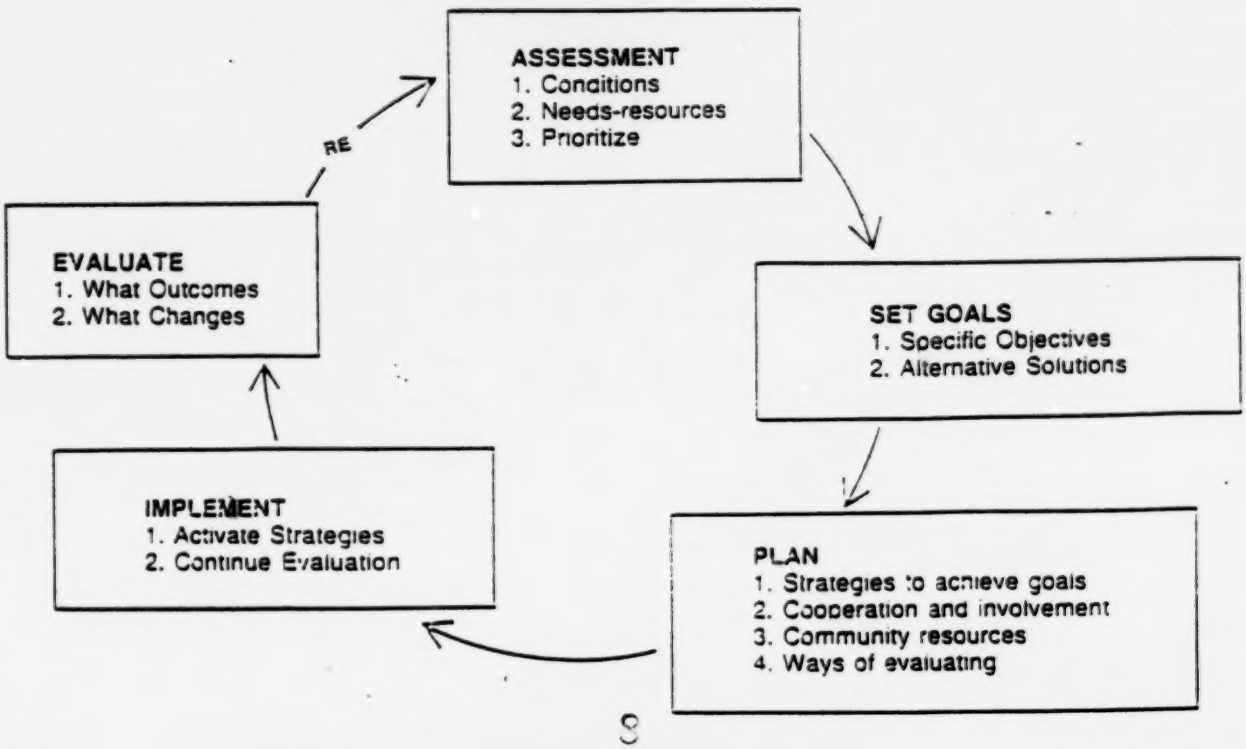

FIGURE #1 (Janove, 1984)

Phase Six involves RE-ASSESSMENT and RE-CYCLING. These processes take place when strategies, activities, and / or programs are completed. Review of the present situation or where we are now, the situational environment, or what conditions exist. Then the cyclic process continues. . .

With scarce human, financial, and agency resources, the need for agency cooperation has never been greater. The idea that agencies working together can do a better job of serving the needs of the people than they could do by working alone is the most important assumption underlying the concept of interagency cooperation. By combining and coordinating forces, united action takes place, and the group's potential for community services becomes greater than individual efforts. The whole is then greater than the sum of the individual parts and synergy is achieved. More individuals are served, agencies are better served, and consequently, communities are better served when people and agencies cooperate.

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